NY Post
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'Diplomatic' Murder Inc.

Despite President Ford's agitated warning that release of the Senate Intelligence Committee's assassination report would "do grievous damage to our country," we believe many Americans will applaud the refusal of Sen. Church and his colleagues to suppress their findings.

We are equally confident that the republic will survive any fall-out from publication of the document, and that free institutions will eventually be strengthened by the bipartisan committee decision to air the truth.

The report does not purport to present the whole truth. It fastidiously avoids dogmatic judgments on some matters in whieh the evidence is inconclusive, in part because death spared some of the central characters from interrogation.

But it offers more than enough grimly factual material to cast a long shadow over the history of four presidencies—from Eisenhower to Kennedy to Johnson and Nixon. Even while the investigators express uncertainty about the degree of White House knowledge of some of the bizarre operations, the pattern of the clandestine exercises has too much continuity to justify retroactive claims of ignorance or innocence in the loftiest places.

Stated bluntly, the report confirms what many leaks, rumors and fragmentary disclosures had long suggested —that agents of the U. S. government, chiefly located in the Central Intelligence Agency, were deeply implicated in a kind of International Murder Incorporated for many long years.

To place corroborative testimony on the official Senate record now will inflict far less "serious damage" on the nation than we would have suffered if the high-pressure executive effort to bury the report had prevailed.

At this late date, it can hardly come as news to the intelligence and diplomatic services of Cuba, for example, that Premier Castro was the target of a series of assassination plots, as well as an absurd plan to coat his shoes with a chemical that would make his beard fall out.

But if all this is no news to Cuba, it must still come as a shock to Americans to learn that our "intelligence" system — or some members thereof — ever believed a beardless Castro would be shorn of influence in Latin America. Are the authors of such grotesque schemes still at their CIA desks?

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Many questions will warrant further inquiry, such as the discrepancy between the testimony of Secretary of State Kissinger and CIA officials about White House authorization for a Chilean kidnapping program in 1970 designed to block Allende's accession to that country's presidency. Kissinger's disclaimers clearly call for full examination of Richard Nixon, who has also publicly — but not under oath — proclaimed the cleanliness of his hands in the Chilean intervention.

The macabre revelation that a CIA official offered a poison pen to a Cuban for use against Castro on the day President Kennedy was slain fortifies the case for further exploration of possible retaliatory links between the multiple U. S. anti-Castro scenarios and the Kennedy assassination.

Above all the Church report cries out for a redefinition of the limits of democracy's secret political warfare and a redesigned system of accountability. It calls not only for such explicit renunciation of resort to terrorism as President Ford has issued but firm legal sanctions against it—and against any men at the top who quietly condone it.

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The argument that "anything goes" in the world conflict with totalitarianism has had its day. It was the primary rationale for the international offenses now exposed, as well as for such domestic crimes as the FBI's hounding of Martin Luther King. The new disclosures dramatize not merely the ugliness but the futility of much of the undercover intrigue we have tolerated too long, even as our leaders were publicly decrying world-wide lawless violence.

Any bad press notices the U. S. receives as a result of the Church Committee report matter far less than the worthy process of national self-examination and reappraisal it has accelerated. A free society cannot let a political underworld shape and execute foreign policy under the respectable camouflage of "security," and with covert protection from on high.

NOV 27 1975